

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0288
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL BELFAST

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SUBJECT: INCREASING TENSIONS IN ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS--
PART I

REF: (A) BELFAST 047; (B) DUBLIN 457; (C) DUBLIN 820

1. SUMMARY: NORTHERN IRELAND SECRETARY OF STATE ROY MASON'S REMARKS IN PARLIAMENT MARCH 6, HAVE RESULTED IN AN ANGRY REACTION FROM ALL QUARTERS, BOTH PUBLIC AND GOVERNMENT, IN THE REPUBLIC, AND ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS ARE RATHER FRAYED AT THE MOMENT. MASON'S MOLLIFYING REMARKS MARCH 9, WERE HARDLY NOTED HERE. THE AFFAIR HAS BROUGHT A RETURN OF BIPARTISANSHIP TOWARD NORTHERN IRELAND -- PRIME MINISTER LYNCH AND OPPOSITION LEADER FITZGERALD ARE UNITED IN THEIR RESENTMENT AT MASON AND FITZGERALD NOW SUPPORTS GOVERNMENT POLICY ON NORTHERN IRELAND. END SUMMARY.

2. THE ACRIMONIOUS EXCHANGE BETWEEN DUBLIN AND LONDON, BOTH JOURNALISTIC AND GOVERNMENTAL (REFTEL BAND PREVIOUS), HEATED UP THIS WEEK IN THE WAKE OF REMARKS
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BY ROY MASON IN PARLIAMENT MARCH 6. THE ORIGINAL EXCHANGE WAS STARTED BY PRIME MINISTER JACK LYNCH'S RADIO INTERVIEW ON JANUARY 8 (DUBLIN 058), AND HAD TO DO MOSTLY WITH LYNCH'S RETURN TO TRADITIONAL FIANNA FAIL POLICY OF ASKING FOR A BRITISH WITHDRAWAL FROM NORTHERN IRELAND. LYNCH SUBSEQUENTLY BLURRED AND SOFTENED HIS LANGUAGE AT THE ANNUAL FIANNA FAIL

CONVENTION FEBRUARY 18, BUT MENTIONED THAT "THE BORDER IS NOT A MAJOR SECURITY PROBLEM NOW." MASON, THIS WEEK, AS WIDELY REPORTED HERE, COUNTERED RATHER STRONGLY THAT THE BORDER IS A SECURITY PROBLEM. THE GOI REPLIED PUBLICLY AT SEVERAL LEVELS AND EVEN CONVENED A RATHER EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF ALL AMBASSADORS RESIDENT IN DUBLIN (EXCEPT THE UK AMBASSADOR) TO EXPLAIN ITS POSITION (SUMMARIZED IN A SEPTTEL). MEANWHILE, ANGRY NATIONALIST FEELING IS RAGING IN VIRTUALLY ALL THE NEWSPAPERS.

3. THE NEWSPAPERS, AND SUBSEQUENTLY THE GOVERNMENT, PICKED OUT THE FOLLOWING MASON POINTS FOR SPECIAL ATTENTION: (A) IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT PERPETRATORS OF THE LE MON MASSACRE REMAINED IN NORTHERN IRELAND -- "THEY COULD EASILY HAVE ESCAPED ACROSS THE BORDER.."; (B) TERRORIST GROUPS COME AND GO ACROSS THE BORDER, SOME GOING SOUTH FOR RECUPERATION AND RESUPPLY, AND FOR MEDICAL ATTENTION; (C) MUCH OF THE EXPLOSIVES AND WEAPONS USED BY THE IRA COMES FROM THE REPUBLIC; (D) LYNCH'S STATEMENT THAT ONLY TWO PERCENT OF THE VIOLENCE IN THE NORTH HAS A CONNECTION WITH THE BORDER IS "WRONG." MASON ALSO SAID THAT "AN ENCOURAGING MEASURE OF PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE", IN RUC/GARDA COOPERATION, BUT THIS POINT WAS MOSTLY IGNORED BY THE PRESS HERE.

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4. MASON'S REMARKS IMMEDIATELY AROUSED CONSIDERABLE IRE IN THE REPUBLIC. LATE IN THE EVENING OF MARCH 6, GOI SPOKESMAN FRANK DUNLOP ISSUED A STATEMENT THAT THERE IS "NOT A SHRED OF EVIDENCE" TO SUPPORT MASON'S "LATEST ALLEGATIONS." THE NEWSPAPERS USED STRONGER LANGUAGE: "... (MASON) CAME OUT WITH A SNARLING, ILL-FOUNDED ATTACK ON THE SOUTH WHICH MIGHT HAVE BEEN CONCOCTED BY MR. IAN PAISLEY, FROM WHOM NO ONE EXPECTS ANYTHING CONSTRUCTIVE" (IRISH INDEPENDENT). "HE IS A TRICKY AND UNDERHAND POLITICIAN AND HE IS PLAYING WITH IRISH LIVES" (IRISH TIMES). "MR. MASON IS PLAYING POLITICS OF A LOW AND VICIOUS NATURE..." (IRISH PRESS).

5. MORE FUEL WAS ADDED TO THE FIRE IN A BRITISH TV PROGRAM ON NORTHERN IRELAND, MARCH 9, WHICH FEATURED AN INTERVIEW WITH JACK LYNCH. THE INTERVIEW WITH LYNCH, AND PRESUMABLY MOST OF THE OTHERS INTERVIEWED ON THE PROGRAM, HAD BEEN TAPED LAST WEEK, PRIOR TO MASON'S PARLIAMENTARY REMARKS, BUT THIS WAS NOT NOTED ON THE PROGRAM AND THE VARIOUS COMMENTS BY LYNCH,

GARRET FITZGERALD, RUAIRE O BRADAIGH, JOHN TAYLOR, IAN PAISLEY, ANDY TYRIE, ETC., ON THE PROGRAM WERE TAKEN BY MOST WATCHERS AS ADDITIONAL ROUNDS IN THE SLANGING MATCH. FRIDAY'S PAPERS WERE FULL OF REACTIONS, FAVORABLE AND UNFAVORABLE, TO THE VARIOUS POSITIONS TAKEN ON THE PROGRAM. DURING HIS INTERVIEW LYNCH REPEATED HIS GENERAL LINE THAT THERE COULD NEVER BE A PERMANENT PEACE IN NORTHERN IRELAND WHILE THE BRITISH PRESENCE REMAINED. HIS REASONING WAS THAT THERE WILL BE FUTURE GENERATIONS PREPARED TO TAKE UP ARMS EVEN THOUGH THEY LACKED THE SUPPORT OF THE

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PEOPLE. THE HISTORY OF IRELAND, PARTICULARLY SINCE PARTITION, PROVED THIS.

6. WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE IDENTITY OF PURPOSE BETWEEN HIMSELF AND THE IRA, NAMELY BREAKING THE LINK WITH BRITAIN, LYNCH REPLIED, "THE BREAKING OF THE LINK, YES, THERE IS NO USE DENYING THAT." HE ADDED, "WE CERTAINLY DON'T APPROVE OF THE PROVO TACTICS. WE WANT, OF COURSE, THE SAME ULTIMATE GOAL, BUT WE WANT IT IN A DIFFERENT WAY. WE WANT TO HAVE IT IN A WAY THAT THE MAJORITY IN THE NORTH CAN LIVE IN FRIENDSHIP... WITHOUT ANY FEAR THAT THEIR TRADITIONS OR RIGHTS WILL BE PREJUDICED BECAUSE OF JOINING US..." HE ALSO SAID HE DID NOT RULE OUT A SEPARATE PARLIAMENT FOR THE NORTH IN A FEDERAL IRELAND. WE ARE POUCHING THE COMPLETE TEXT OF THE ORIGINAL LYNCH INTERVIEW (NOT MUCH WAS USED ON THE PROGRAM)-- IT IS THE LATEST AND MOST AUTHORITATIVE

SUMMARY OF PRESENT GOI POLICY ON NORTHERN IRELAND.

7. THE REACTION TO THE TV PROGRAM AND FURTHER MUSING ON THE EARLIER EXCHANGES ALMOST ENTIRELY OBLITERATED MENTION OF MASON'S SUBSEQUENT APPEARANCE IN PARLIAMENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MARCH 9, IN WHICH HE APPARENTLY ATTEMPTED TO SMOOTH THINGS OVER AND HAD GOOD THINGS TO SAY ABOUT LYNCH AND SECURITY COOPERATION. AT LEAST THE IRISH TIMES NOTED THE ATTEMPT IN AN ARTICLE HEADED "MASON TRIES TO SMOOTH RIFT WITH DUBLIN."

8. MEANWHILE, OPPOSITION PARTY LEADER, GARRET FITZGERALD SPOKE OUT MARCH 10, IN SUPPORT OF LYNCH IN THE ROW WITH MASON. DECLARING IT WAS A PITY THAT ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS WERE BEING DESTROYED, HE SAID THAT MASON'S CLAIM THAT THE IRA WERE USING THE REPUBLIC AS A BASE AND A CENTER FOR REST AND RECUPERATION WAS UNPRINCIPLED AND LESS THAN HONEST. FITZGERALD SUGGESTED MASON'S COMMENTS WERE DESIGNED TO GET HIM OFF THE HOOK AFTER EARLIER STATEMENTS HE HAD MADE ABOUT DEFEATING THE IRA PROVED WIDE OF THE MARK. FITZGERALD ADDED THAT HE FOUND THE DEBATE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS MOST DEPRESSING SINCE MOST MP'S SEEMED TOTALLY UNINFORMED ABOUT CONDITIONS IN AN AREA WHICH THEY CONSIDERED TO BE PART OF THE UNITED KINGDOM. IN A MARCH 12 INTERVIEW FITZGERALD NOTED THAT MASON'S REMARKS HAD BROUGHT IRELAND'S TWO MAJOR PARTIES, FIANNA FAIL AND FINE GAEIL, CLOSER TOGETHER ON NORTHERN IRELAND POLICY THEN THEY HAD BEEN SINCE 1975. SHANNON

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